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# WILLIAM Z. FOSTER



*A Communist's*  
FIFTY YEARS *of Workingclass*  
*Leadership and Struggle*

*by*

ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN

*Labor's Own*

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*A Communist's Fifty Years  
of Working-Class Leadership  
and Struggle*

By Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn is a member of the National Committee of the Communist Party, U.S.A., and a veteran leader of the American labor movement. She participated actively in the powerful struggles for the industrial unionization of the basic industries in the U.S.A. and is known to hundreds of thousands of trade unionists as one of the most tireless and dauntless fighters in the working-class movement.

She is the author of numerous pamphlets including *The Twelve and You* and *Woman's Place in the Fight for a Better World*; her column, "The Life of the Party," appears each day in the *Daily Worker*.



## *Labor's Own*

### WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

TAUNTON, ENGLAND, is famous for Bloody Judge Jeffrey, who hanged 134 people and banished 400 in 1685. Some homesick exiles landed on the barren coast of New England, where a namesake city was born.

Taunton, Mass., has a nobler history. In 1776 it was the first place in the country where a revolutionary flag was flown, "The red flag of Taunton that flies o'er the green," as recorded by a local poet. A century later, in 1881, in this city a child was born to a poor Irish immigrant family named Foster, who were exiles from their impoverished and enslaved homeland to New England. The father was unable to support his large family there. When the little boy was six, they moved away to Philadelphia and were forgotten in Taunton.

#### *"BILL FOSTER WAS BORN HERE"*

Taunton awoke years later to fame as the birthplace of the Chairman of the Communist Party. Workers thereabouts began to remark, "Say, what do you know—Bill Foster was born here!" A newspaper headlined the news with a sort of rueful pride, in the "Hometown boy makes good" manner, after carefully checking all the records. Maybe in the next century, which isn't so far off, the historic "green" will be renamed for a native-born Irish-American worker, "a Red" like that early revolutionary flag—*William Z. Foster*.

On February 25 Bill Foster, as he is known to thousands of railroad workers, miners, sailors, lumberjacks, and longshoremen, was sixty-eight. Today he is under arrest with eleven



other members of the National Committee of the Communist Party, accused by the U.S. Government of the advocacy of political ideas. They are ideas of human freedom which began for Bill Foster with the sad Irish lullabies his mother sang and the glowing tales his Fenian father told of the age-long struggle for Irish freedom. They are the ideas which caused the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison to be dragged through the streets of Boston with a rope around his neck and Eliza Lovejoy to die defending his printing press, in Alton, Ill.

They are the ideas which wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation. They are the ideas that fought a revolution, and later caused men to feel that black slavery was a shame and disgrace in our land and that white men must be willing to die in a Civil War to end it. They are the ideas that built the fighting American labor movement to end wage slavery, which produced men of a heroic mold, to which Foster belongs—Sylvia, Parsons, Debs, Haywood, Ruthenberg, St. John, Mooney. These ideas are the tough native roots behind Bill Foster, Communist.

### *WHY WAIT FOR HISTORY TO DECIDE?*

History has a long-range perspective. It ultimately passes stern judgment on tyrants and vindicates those who fought, suffered, were imprisoned, and died for human freedom, against political oppression and economic slavery. Pioneers who were reviled, persecuted, ridiculed and abused when they fought for free public schools, woman's suffrage, against chattel slavery, for labor unions, are honored and revered today. A hundred years ago the first unions were charged with "*conspiracy*," the same legal drag-net that is used today in the Taft-Hartley law to shackle the American workers' unions, and in the political thought-control indictment against Bill Foster and his comrades.

Must we wait for future generations to write a just verdict



William Z. Foster, National Chairman, Communist Party

on the struggles of today? The American working class, of which Bill Foster is flesh and blood, can pass their own judgment on the life of Bill Foster and the lessons it taught him, as one of them. He knows the life of a worker not from books

alone but from his own vast experience, from which many books could be written. In two of his autobiographical books, *From Bryan to Stalin* and *Pages from a Worker's Life*, he has given us a wealth of material on the struggles of the American workers for the past sixty years. Socialism is his solution for their needs.

## “THE IRON OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE”

The Foster family were very poor. There was a terrible depression in the 90's, one of capitalism's regular breakdowns. His father, an unskilled laborer, could not find work. His mother was over-burdened with excessive child-bearing and household drudgery. The family lived in the slums of Philadelphia. At the age of seven he sold newspapers. At ten he was compelled to leave school and go to work. *“Denied an education and living in a poverty-stricken home, I early felt the iron of the class struggle sink into my heart,”* he says.

His first experience with a strike was at the age of 15 during a Philadelphia carmen's strike. His youthful ardor for the freedom of Ireland gradually faded and his interest was centered more and more on the many struggles of American labor of that period. The 80's and 90's in which Foster grew to manhood were high points of militancy.

## “ALL FOR THE WORKERS”

Some of the greatest strikes in American labor history occurred then. He was greatly stirred and had sympathy for the strikers only. The 8-hour strike movement of 1886, centering in Chicago, which resulted in the Haymarket frame-up and the hanging of five leaders; the hard fought steel strike at Homestead, Pa. in 1892, where the Pinkerton thugs were captured and driven out by the workers; the strike of the American Railway Union, led by Eugene V. Debs, which was



crushed by the Federal government, and a series of bitter struggles by the hard ore miners of the West. "Coxey's Army" of unemployed workers which marched to Washington in 1892 captured his imagination. He hung around the bulletin boards to follow its progress and was outraged when Coxey was arrested in Washington. Little did this thin, poorly clad, underfed youth suspect that within twenty-five years he would be leading the greatest steel strike this country ever saw, or be arrested, as Coxey was, for leading unemployed workers to demand action from their elected officials. Yes, "Bill Foster's ideas" began to germinate at an early age.

## BILL FOSTER BECOMES A SOCIALIST

By the time he was nineteen he had worked in a fertilizer plant, a lumber camp, and as a motorman on the 3rd Ave. line, in N.Y.C., where he joined a union, tried to organize the car barns, and was fired. He was a natural student. He read incessantly, especially history and science. He had, as yet, never seen a Socialist book or pamphlet. His complete disillusionment with capitalism and all its works, results of his own observations and experience, had prepared him, however, for becoming a Socialist.

Bill describes how it happened: "One night in 1900 I was walking along at Broad and South Streets [Philadelphia] and noticing a street speaker, I stopped to listen. He was a Socialist. His name I never learned. I listened entranced by what the speaker said. I found myself in complete agreement with him. His argument and analysis seemed to give real meaning to all my experience in the class struggle. *His proposal for the workers to take over the government and the industries and to abolish the profit system appealed to me as the only real solution and all my years of later experience in life have only confirmed this first opinion.* The speaker was a good one and I drank in his words eagerly. I left the meeting in great enthu-

siasm, later eagerly reading a couple of pamphlets I had bought at the time. Although with only an inkling of the great world outlook comprised under the term Socialism, *I began to count myself, from that time on, a Socialist. That street meeting indeed marked a great turning point in my life.*"

The Czar was on his throne in old Russia, when Bill Foster, a youth of 19, decided "*I am a Socialist.*" American conditions, the class struggle here, the suffering of his mother, the poverty of his family, his hunger for an education were factors in this decision. The somber, hungry children of the poor, wide-eyed and serious, share the worries and indignities, the sufferings and sorrows of their parents—the discouraged father who returns daily from a vain search for work, the mother who struggles with the overdue rent, the unpaid grocery-bills, the gas turned off, etc. Too young to vote, he was ready to change the system. He walked six miles with another worker to encourage him to vote for Debs in 1900.

Little did he suspect then that like Debs he would be a candidate for President, on the Communist Party ticket, in 1924, '28 and '32, inheriting the fighting Socialist traditions of Eugene V. Debs, who ran for the last time in 1920, while imprisoned in Atlanta Penitentiary for his Socialist ideas.

## HE MEETS "JIM CROW"

The lead in a type foundry and the dusts of the fertilizer plant developed tuberculosis in this young worker.

His first experiences away from home were in the South in 1900, which left an indelible impression. The peonage system in "free" industry in Florida, the chain gangs, the prison labor camps—and especially the brutal persecution of the Negro workers—shocked him immeasurably. "The line between 'free' and prison labor was a thin one in the Florida backwoods," he writes. It still is. Nightriders rode into one camp where he worked looking for the Negro workers, who had



fled into the woods. He was threatened with the turpentine camp if he attempted to quit so he fled in the night by jumping a freight car.

A few months later he worked in a railroad yard in Echo, Texas, as a railroad cook. It was a tough country where whites dominated Negroes and Mexicans with gun and knife and where these workers were held in a state of semi-peonage, as they are today. Young Bill Foster burned with indignation at the treatment of the Negro people in the Southland and resolved, as Abraham Lincoln is reputed to have done when he saw a slave sold on a block, "to smash that system."

He has delivered powerful blows against the brutal Jim-Crow system of the South and North. Years later in the packinghouse union which he organized "back of the yards" in Chicago, there was the largest number of Negro trade union workers ever organized in any city of this country. Later in the steel strike he was confronted by the problem of the company bringing 30,000 to 40,000 Negro workers from the South as strike-breakers. Although many of them quit on learning that they were there as "scabs," race hatred was fanned among them and the white strikers by company stooges. Foster fought to resolve this problem and forge unity of white and black workers.

In his book *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* he expressed his confidence that the Negro worker will shake off "the insidious efforts of unscrupulous white employers and misguided intellectuals of his own race to make a professional strikebreaker out of him." The steel barons reaped the whirlwind of the seed they sowed in 1919 and Foster's faith was justified when the Negro steel workers were among the very first to respond to the C.I.O. call in 1936 and are a strong fighting core of the steel unions today.

The Jim-Crow system still disgraces our country. Bill Foster and his Party, the Communist Party, have fought it consistently and boldly since our Party was born. Beside him on trial today

are two outstanding Communist leaders, who represent the Negro people and their fight for freedom—Communist Councilman Ben Davis of N. Y. City, born in Georgia, and Henry Winston, youth leader, World War II veteran, Organizational Secretary of the Communist Party—born in Mississippi.

## BILL FOSTER GOES TO SEA

At twenty he went to sea for three years as an able-bodied seaman. He covered fifty thousand miles in "square riggers"—the last of the sailing ships. His fascinating sea stories, of the "Pegasus" rounding Cape Horn, the "Black Prince," the "Alliance" and the "County of Cardigan," and their trips to Africa, Australia, and South America equal any written by Jack London. They are a lively chapter in *Pages from a Workers Life*.

Once I heard Bill Foster ask a toothless old sailor: "How did you like my sea stories?" The old worker chortled: "Damn good, Bill, it's all there all right, it's all there!" Hunger, hardship, danger, low wages, the most callous and brutal exploitation of those homeless, wandering men—the sailors of yesterday—helped to steel Bill Foster to the need of militant unions, while knocking around in a windjammer helped heal his lungs. He was a member of the Atlantic Coast Seamen's Union.

## "ON THE HOBO" AS A MIGRATORY WORKER

But like many adventurous Eastern youths at the turn of the century the lure of the West was strong. He quit the sea to become a migratory worker "on the hobo" as it was then called. In sixteen years Bill Foster "beat his way" over thirty-five thousand miles of railroads. At first he travelled to look for work and see the country at the same time. Later he travelled to do agitational work for the Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) and the Trade Union Educational League.



Bill Foster as a railroad worker before first World War

Railroading was dangerous and "besides hunger and cold the hobo was confronted with a maze of perils." On one trip Bill froze both feet. Some of his narrow escapes from death are hair-raising. The floating migratory workers were loggers, saw-mill workers, harvest hands, sheep herders, cow punchers,



fishermen, sailors, miners, railroad construction laborers. Bill Foster worked at every kind of job, even homesteading a plot of free government land in eastern Oregon, the only private property he ever owned.

During this period Foster was an active member of the Socialist Party, in Portland, Oregon. As usual, he read avidly—Marx's *Capital* which first appeared in English at that time, Engels, Kautsky, local Socialist pamphlets, and the *Appeal to Reason* which was called by the Red-baiters of that day "Appeal to Treason." The circulation of this paper soared into millions of copies during the mass defense campaign for Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone, Western Miners' union leaders tried in Idaho in 1907.

## THE LEFT-WING EMERGES

Bill Foster's strong working-class consciousness, in common with many other working-class Socialists, rebelled against the official domination of the Socialist Party by ultra-vocal lawyers, doctors, priests, preachers, small manufacturers, business men, with an occasional "millionaire Socialist" thrown in. He felt strongly that the Socialist Party should be a real leader of the workers in the class struggle, that it should fight for the organization of the masses of the unorganized workers into industrial unions and not be just a tail to the A. F. of L. kite. He felt that workers must be the dominant element in the membership and leadership of a Socialist Party. The maximum program of these "middle-class intellectuals" was described by him as "a thin gruel of government-owned industries duly bought from the capitalists and called Socialism," much like they have in England today.

It was in revolt against such policies that the "Left-wing" movement began to take shape, in the West among the native-born unorganized migratory Socialist workers and in the East among the foreign-born, unskilled, unorganized Socialist

workers in mass production industry. Their struggle within the Socialist Party resulted in the expulsion in 1909 of members around the *Seattle Socialist* in the Northwest for "left opposition," of which Wm. Z. Foster was one. In 1912 William D. Haywood and other workers grouped around the *International Socialist Review* in Chicago were similarly expelled.

This basic struggle culminated seven years later when the state organizations of Michigan and Massachusetts and seven language federations were expelled by the Socialist Party's Right-wing national executive committee. By that time the "Left wing" constituted the overwhelming majority of the party, and they reconstituted themselves into the Communist Party. Early in his life Foster was attached to the best militant working-class elements within the old Socialist Party, which ten years later became the core of the Communist Party. But because he believed in 1909, as many of us did then, that industrial unionism was the high road to freedom, he became a member of the new kind of union then emerging.

### *FOSTER BECOMES AN I.W.W.*

After the Knights of Labor had disintegrated and the American Federation of Labor came into existence in 1886, the unskilled workers in both mass production industries and migratory seasonal work remained largely unorganized. Independent unions, such as the American Railroad Union, led by Debs, and the Western Federation of Miners, led by Haywood, engaged in tremendous strike struggles, to meet the dire needs of the overworked and underpaid toilers. Most of these fighting independent unions were Socialist led. By 1905 they determined to unite and build a "one big union" movement in the U.S.A.

A manifesto signed by Debs, Haywood, Mother Jones and other well-known Socialists of that day, called them together in Chicago in June, 1905 and the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers



of the World) was born. It was destined to flash like a flaming meteor across the horizon of the labor movement for the next fifteen years.

The contribution it made to turning over the ground and sowing the seeds of industrial unionism cannot be discounted. It boldly fanned the flames of discontent in the minds of millions of toilers. The I.W.W. aimed to organize all workers, regardless of race, creed, color, nationality, skill, or the lack of it, into one union. Sam Gompers, President of the A. F. of L., had called the foreign born, unskilled, women, and Negro workers "unorganizable." It aimed to fight for any and all the economic needs of all the workers and *ultimately to abolish the wage system and establish Socialism*. Naturally it attracted many diverse elements, including what was left of the Knights of Labor, who hated the rival A. F. of L. which had succeeded them; the Socialist Labor Party, who had launched a Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance as a rival to the A. F. of L., and syndicalists who believed only in the economic struggles and scorned political parties.

In his book *From Bryan to Stalin*, Foster explains many factors which produced the anti-political tendencies in the American labor movement at the turn of the century. But in spite of its theoretical fallacies and organizational weaknesses, the I.W.W. led a whole series of magnificent mass struggles in a period of a few years, such as the Lawrence textile strike of 1912; the Paterson silk strike of 1913; as well as strikes in rubber at Akron, Ohio; in lumber in Washington and Louisiana; of iron ore on the Mesaba Range in Minnesota.

## HE FIGHTS FOR FREE SPEECH

One of the contradictions of its fighting career was that the I.W.W. carried on magnificent struggles of a political character to enforce labor laws and to defend the rights of free speech and assemblage. The Bill of Rights was the Sermon on

the Mount to the I.W.W. My first recollection of meeting Bill Foster was in 1909 during such a free speech fight in Spokane, Washington, although we may have met earlier at Hissoula, Mont., during a similar struggle. I was on my first trip West as an I.W.W. speaker.

We were both arrested in Spokane, defending free speech and we are now, forty years later, fighting *a thought control indictment* against the Communist Party. We are again defending the Bill of Rights, for free speech, free assemblage and free press. *When Bill Foster was arrested in 1948 in this present case, it was the nineteenth time he had been arrested for free speech.* He was arrested trying to hold meetings in seven company towns of Western Pennsylvania during the steel strike of 1919 and three times as a Presidential candidate when he was denied the right to hold meetings in Scranton, Lawrence, and Los Angeles. Few Americans have such a long and consistent record of fighting to uphold the constitutional rights of the American workers as has Bill Foster.

## FIGHTING THE EMPLOYMENT SHARKS

In Spokane the fight was against a city ordinance prohibiting all I.W.W. meetings in the working-class section of the town. Thousands of homeless, migratory seasonal workers poured in every winter and the I.W.W. hall, one of the largest in the city, was their Mecca. That winter the I.W.W. was waging a campaign exposing "the employment sharks,"—agencies who cheated the workers out of exorbitant fees for far-off jobs which often proved non-existent. "Perpetual motion," the workers sarcastically called it, "a crew on the job, one going to it, and one coming away."

Meetings were held outside these agencies by the I.W.W. It was to stop them that the ordinance was passed. After "filling the jails" over and over again with volunteers from all over the West the I.W.W. finally won their right to speak

and regulations of the employment agencies were passed. Bill Foster describes this struggle as "an epic of police brutality and working class heroism." He was on the committee which finally settled the terms of victory.

## *FOSTER STUDIES LABOR IN FRANCE AND GERMANY*

Bill Foster had already made one trip around the world as a seaman but so far had no contact with unions elsewhere. After Spokane he decided to go to Europe and study the labor and Socialist movements of various countries. He hoboed to N. Y. and with \$100 in his pocket set forth in 1910 on his journey. He had a strong sense of international working-class solidarity, and the spectacular success of the C.G.T. (General Confederation of Labor) of France drew him like a magnet. Like the I.W.W. this was a syndicalist organization.

He stayed six months, attended their convention, met all the French leaders, participated in a railroad strike and read widely of their literature. Bill Foster, a worker who went to school for only three years, has a speaking and reading knowledge of many languages which he felt it was necessary to learn in order to understand the workers' movement in many countries.

After six months in France he went to Germany for six months, where he attended meetings, conventions, strike gatherings, met the union leaders and the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, including Karl Kautsky and Karl Liebknecht. He studied German to be able to converse and read.

He attended a funeral of a Social Democratic leader where ninety percent of the mourners wore high hats. He was so shocked at "aping this master class custom" that he wrote a letter back to France describing it. It was published and drew a heated German rebuke to "this nobody from America" who criticized them. He accused them of "tailing after the capital-

ist class." Three years later his unfavorable judgment was justified to the full when they supported the war which their ruling class started.

He was studying Spanish and Italian preparatory to a six months stay in Italy and Spain, when he received a cablegram from home. It was from Vincent St. John, the general secretary of the I.W.W., authorizing him to go to a convention of the International Trade Union Secretariat at Budapest, Hungary, in August, 1911. There were present the highest top union officials from every country. Up stepped an unknown young worker from America to challenge the credentials of James Duncan, a vice-president of the A. F. of L., and to demand a seat for the I.W.W. In spite of the steamroller methods of the chairman, the chief of the German Federation of Trade Unions, this "wobbly" from the West was not to be squelched. The conference debated the issue for two days. The French delegates supported his proposal and also saved him from jail, when he was arrested for sleeping in a moving van because he was penniless.

His first of many visits to Europe was cut short by a call to report back to an I.W.W. convention. But his militant pugnacity and persistence were long remembered by the European leaders and especially by the embarrassed Mr. Duncan. They were not surprised to hear of him again, a few years later as a leader of militant action.

## *HE TAKES HIS STAND AGAINST DUAL UNIONISM*

Foster's trip to Europe caused him to change his mind about one aspect of I.W.W. tactics, namely "dual unionism." Although it was deeply rooted in the American Left-wing movement, Foster, with the bold courage which has always characterized his work, determined to raise the question. He proposed that the I.W.W. should concentrate on organizing



the unorganized workers who were largely the unskilled, but should dissolve its dual unions in the skilled crafts and send these members back inside the existing craft unions, such as mining, building trades, metal, printing and railroad. While Foster won many to his view and others were willing to agree in part, the wave of I.W.W.-led strikes, starting at Lawrence, Mass., with 23,000 workers set back any further discussions for years.

That winter Foster made a 6,000-mile trip back to the Northwest, froze his hands and face and narrowly escaped death on the road, trying to organize the Syndicalist League of North America. Among its members were Tom Mooney, Jack Johnstone, Lucy Parsons, and Sam Hammersmark. Tom Mann came from England in 1913 and toured the country for the League.

In the summer of 1912 Bill Foster wrote his first pamphlet. Previously he had written articles and reports for Socialist and I.W.W. papers. Now while working as a canvasman in a circus he wrote *Syndicalism*. He has since written many pamphlets, and is the author of at least seven books. His career as a writer began on a circus wagon, driving through the corn belt of Indiana and Illinois. Bill never scorned any kind of task especially if it served his organizing work.

## THE GREATEST LABOR ORGANIZER YET

Out of the experiment of the Syndicalist League grew the International Trade Union Educational League in 1915, with Foster as its secretary. At that time he was working in the carbarns in the stockyards and was elected organizer of the Chicago District Council of the Railway Carmen. Quite unconscious of it, he was moving swiftly now in the direction of demonstrating his capacity as a working-class leader, although all surrounding conditions were apparently unfavorable. In 1917 the U.S.A. entered World War I. Foster was at odds



with both the Socialists and the I.W.W. The league had disintegrated. He belonged only to his union.

As he worked in the freight yards he remarked: "I felt quite helpless I must say. There was I working 12 hours a day, seven days a week, unable even to attend the meetings of the Chicago Federation of Labor, of which I was a delegate. Finally one day as I was walking to work, and I remember it was July 11, 1917, it struck me suddenly that perhaps I could get a campaign started to organize the workers in the great Chicago packing houses, whom the A. F. of L. had neglected for years."

Four days later his plan was under way and one of the greatest labor organizers our country has ever known, had begun his self-appointed task. Within the next two years he headed campaigns which organized 200,000 packinghouse workers on a national scale and 400,000 steel workers. He was successful in organizing the two first mass production industries ever organized in America. Bill Foster never lost faith in the workers.

Here was a leader out of the very bone and sinews of the working class, who knew their every need from his own bitter experiences, who had devoted his every waking hour for years to their problems, and who was dedicated to win their battle.

## FAITH IN THE WORKERS

In 1936, in his pamphlet *Unionizing Steel*, written for the benefit of the C.I.O. in their organizing campaign, he remarks: "*I was never one of those who considered the organization of workers such a huge task. The decisive thing is to go about the work with the necessary resources, determination and flexibility of tactics.*"

Years before he had stated in his book *The Great Steel Strike* this same confidence in the workers, when he said: "*The organization of working people into trade unions is a*

*comparatively simple matter when it is properly handled. It depends almost entirely upon the honesty, intelligence, power and persistence of the organizational forces. . . . In view of its great wealth and latent power, it can be truthfully said that there isn't an industry in the country which the trade union movement cannot organize any time it sees fit. The problem in any case is merely to develop the proper organization crews and systems, and the freedom-hungry workers, skilled and unskilled, men or women, black or white, will react almost as naturally and inevitably as water runs down a hill."*

He demonstrated on a giant stage the truth of his words, namely in the two key war industries, meat-packing and steel. The C.I.O. should heed these wise words today, especially in the South.

## TO WIN A BETTER LIFE

Foster did not set out to win an argument, but to win a better life for thousands of exploited workers. As he knew the misery of the seafaring man and the homeless, penniless, voteless floaters of the West, from his own life, now he had worked in those filthy stockyards, which Upton Sinclair had described in all their horror in *The Jungle*. He knew the enormous profits made by the five packers—Armour, Swift, Morris, Cudahy, and Wilson. Armour alone made 40 millions in 1917.

He knew the needs of the workers there because he was one of them. He had worked in the car shops of Swift & Company, where refrigerator cars were built which were the basis for their far-flung distribution of meat. Yet in the winter of 1915 he had worked for such miserable wages that he was too poor to buy an overcoat to protect him against the bitter winds of a Chicago winter.

## FOSTER ORGANIZES PACKING

They could not call him "an outside agitator" or "a foreign agent." The workers knew him as one of themselves. He wasn't one of the paid "armchair organizers" who had betrayed them many times before. Foster, the exploited worker from the yards, turned labor organizer with a deadly wallop.

A Vice-President of Armour had insulted a union committee a few years before, when they came to complain of low wages, long hours, dangerous and unsanitary working conditions in the slave-pens of the yards. He had said finally, "*Tell your Union friends Organized Labor will never get anything from this company that it hasn't the power to take.*" The big bosses surrounded themselves with labor spies, gunmen, blacklists, to protect themselves from such demands by workers. Bill Foster said, "I never forgot those cynical words, nor did I fail to draw the full class struggle logic from them."

So he set out to organize two hundred thousand packing-house workers throughout the United States, to back up their all too moderate demands, at the same time boldly calling a national conference threatening a strike if necessary. This electrified the workers and brought them surging into the surprised A. F. of L. unions who were grudgingly carried along in the campaign. These cooperating unions were joined together in a loose committee with John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor as Chairman and Foster as Secretary. The organizing of the packing industry, considered hopeless for years by these same unions, spread like wildfire to all the big western packing centers.

Workers were fired and a national strike vote was carried almost 100 per cent. With the huge wartime demand for foodstuffs the packers could not stand a strike. This was the first mass production industry to be completely organized. Foster's plan of action and strategy had succeeded in a few months. The workers were solid. They were willing to strike.

They had "the power" now. They were good and ready to use it.

Then the government stepped in, and under pressure the A. F. of L. leadership accepted mediation by the Federal Mediation Commission. The arbitration proceedings were highly dramatic.

Foster tells the story in his *Pages from a Worker's Life*. For three weeks the unions exposed the conditions in this rich industry. Many of the workers were immigrants, many were Negroes. "These workers' stories," he says, "were an epic of proletarian poverty, misery and exploitation; a long recital of starvation, exhausting labor, sickness, mutilation, ignorance, drunkenness, insanity, despair and death." One poverty-stricken Polish woman worker said she had a hat when she came from Poland but it got worn out and she never could afford another one.

### MILLIONS IN BACK PAY

In December, 1917, the Federal Mediation Commission, agreed to the right to organize, a 10 percent wage increase, seniority, no discrimination, to abolish arbitrary discharge, establish sanitary lunchrooms, dressing and washrooms.

In March, 1918, Judge Altschuler, the Administrator of the Packing Industry, announced his decision. He granted about 85 percent of the additional demands, which included 10 to 25 per cent wage increases, an eight-hour day with ten hours' pay, extra time for overtime, equal pay for men and women, a guarantee of five days' work per week and lunch periods with pay. Such gains were a great victory for the workers, but to top it off the award was retroactive. The 125,000 workers of the Big Five received six millions dollars in back pay, an average of \$40 per worker. That could buy some overcoats and hats all right!

What happened later Foster tells in his book *Misleaders of Labor*. The Stockyard Labor Council which he had set up to



include all trades was broken up by conservative union leaders and the industrial unions distributed to the A. F. of L. craft unions, which was fatal to unity. However, those splendid beginnings of industrial unionism among the packinghouse workers were not wholly lost. They responded readily to the call of the C.I.O. when it came. These workers in basic industry needed and demanded industrial unions after 1920. Bill Foster had taught them that lesson very well.

## FOSTER ORGANIZES STEEL

While Bill sat in the arbitration hearings on packing he had a plan for organizing steel, the citadel of the open shop, in his pocket. His own union, the Railway Carmen, continued to support his efforts, and the Chicago Federation of Labor (A. F. of L.) unanimously endorsed his campaign to organize steel.

In his book *The Great Steel Strike and its Lessons*, and his pamphlets *Unionizing Steel*; also *Organizing Methods in the Steel Industry* and *What Means a Strike in Steel*, he has given his views and conclusions in detail on how the great 1919 effort helped the big C.I.O. drive in 1936. Recently I heard Leo Kryski tell how John Fitzpatrick labored to convince Sam Gompers on the steel organizing plan. Finally the wily Gompers asked: "All right! But who's going to do it? Have you got a man to do it?" Fitzpatrick replied, "Yes, I've got the man—Bill Foster."

When finally representatives of fifteen international unions came together in Chicago, Gompers said casually: "Well, Brother Foster, you have called us together. What do you propose?" They grudgingly agreed to a federated campaign to which they contributed the ridiculous sum of \$100 each. They elected Gompers chairman and Foster the unpaid secretary of a National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers. Fortunately his own union paid his wages as an



organizer. He remarked with justifiable bitterness: "One would think we were setting out to organize a bunch of peanut stands instead of a half million unorganized workers." Gompers never spoke at a steel workers' meeting. Finally he resigned and appointed Fitzpatrick as chairman.

## STRONG AS STEEL

But William Z. Foster has a will power as strong as the steel they make in the big plants. Bill Foster is a tactician and strategist, an architect of the labor movement. His plans to organize the unorganized in basic industry could have anticipated the C.I.O. by fifteen years, if he had been given adequate financial support and a group of capable organizers with full co-operation for a swift simultaneous national organizing drive in all steel centers as he had planned. He had a time schedule of six weeks mapped out. He was deeply dismayed at the indifference of the A. F. of L. leaders but he did not give up. There was a job to do. He knew it could be done and how to do it. Although his resources were meager and his forces few, he went ahead. I have yet to see Bill Foster discouraged. He can be angry, disgusted, in his battle for action, for unity, against sabotage, against sectarianism—but never discouraged.

A quiet determined man, he proceeded in a systematic way to accomplish in a few months, against all odds, almost single-handed, what the *New Republic* called "a miracle of organization." The *Journal of Political Economy* of that day commended "his remarkable ability."

## HE TAUGHT THE BOSSES A FEW THINGS

More than one employer, like the head of the Union Stockyard Company in Chicago, conceded: "Well, Foster, I must admit you fellows taught me a few things about my workers that I never knew before!"



A steel strike meeting in 1919, near Pittsburgh. Foster (extreme right, first row on platform) listens as "Mother" Jones speaks to strikers.

Perhaps you are beginning to see now why Foster was indicted for his ideas. They have cost the profiteers of this country millions of dollars in wages. They challenged the bosses' open shops, company unions, company towns, private guards, dangerous mills, the low wages they paid, the long hours they exacted. They challenged the right of capitalism to exist. Foster's crime in the eyes of the capitalist class is simple. Like Jesus, *"he stirreth up the people."* They saw how quickly he had succeeded in organizing packing. They set every possible obstacle to prevent the steel workers organizing. The class struggle was bared in all its cunning and brutality. But the Giant, Labor, in the steel mills heard the call. In the Calumet district—South Chicago, Gary, Indiana Harbor—where the drive started, the steel workers stampeded into the union.

Judge Gary, head of U.S. Steel, tried to head off the drive by applying his contemptible *"Give them an extra cup of rice!"*

He ordered a national basic eight-hour day, which meant two hours overtime pay per day.

## *FOSTER TACKLES PITTSBURGH*

Next came the heart of American steel making—Pittsburgh, with great mills in the city and in at least twenty-five surrounding towns. Foster and his band of organizers moved in on October 1, 1918.

In the course of the drive, 30,000 workers were fired; the K.K.K. appeared; spy systems spread; speech and assemblage were suppressed in these company towns which were literally industrial prisons. Organizers were beaten and jailed and one, Mrs. Fanny Sellins, was brutally murdered. When Rabbi Wise of New York went to speak at a free speech protest meeting, Mayor Crawford of Duquesne, called the "Toad" by the workers, remarked: "Jesus Christ himself could not speak for the A. F. of L." in Duquesne.

But by June, 1918, 100,000 workers were in the union and a demand made on Judge Gary for collective bargaining. He ignored their letter. A 98 per cent vote was taken to strike. On September 22, 304,000 workers quit the mills. By the 30th there were 365,000 out in 50 cities in ten states. Indescribable terror was let loose on the steel strikers. Picketing was forbidden.

There were 33 national groups, many foreign-born. Language was a tremendous problem in meetings, literature, for organizers; Foster trained the English speakers to use such simple non-technical speech, slow, distinct and repeating, that many foreigners began to learn English at these meetings, an "Americanization" by-product of the strike.

A barrage of Red-baiting was let loose on Foster by a Senate "Investigation" Committee. He was pictured as the chief Red in America who was using a strike to start a revolution. All the organizers were called "I.W.W.'s." His pam-



phlets on syndicalism and his I.W.W. activities were headlined. He was a "Bolshevik." The conditions of the steel workers were purposely forgotten, as always happens when Red-baiting is injected into a labor struggle. But this did not break the strike. The workers maintained magnificent unity as long as possible, and were supported by other workers—but not by the "co-operating" unions of the A. F. of L. The needle trades workers of New York alone contributed \$180,000.

After three and one-half months of terror and hunger the strike was called off in January, 1920.

### C.I.O. REAPED THE HARVEST

Twenty workers laid down their lives in that strike. It took another 16 years before the C.I.O., following much the same plan as Foster had, but supported with a half-million dollar organizing fund, was able to build a steel workers' union. It would be well for those who are its officers today to remember the tremendous task Bill Foster did, of which they finally reaped the harvest. I have heard it reported that Philip Murray, now President of the United Steel Workers of America, once said: "*There's one Communist my door is always open to—Bill Foster, for what he did for the steel workers!*"

It will be a shame and a disgrace to every packinghouse worker and steel worker of today and to the leadership of both C.I.O. and A. F. of L. if, after thirty years, Wall Street will be able to finally punish Bill Foster for these great struggles for a better world for labor. He helped to lay the cornerstones of the unions of today. His battle cry was "Organize the unorganized into industrial unions." Can workers stand idle and indifferent to his defense and let them jail him today for his long life of service to his class?



## REACTION ON RAMPAGE IN 1920

Many a man would have given up after such heroic efforts. But "impossible" is not in Foster's dictionary. The battle lost did not mean that the class war was over. Debs was in prison, as were many I.W.W. leaders. The Palmer anti-Red raids were let loose on the nation in January, 1920, when over 10,000 "Reds," many union members, especially of those needle trades unions that had supported steel, were arrested in 56 cities. There were bomb scares, spy scares, foreign agent charges, deportation drives on the foreign-born.

Foster went back to Chicago more convinced than ever that industrial unionism was the great need of the workers. A handful of "militants" had been able to prove this in the face of the "crassest incompetence, indifference and downright sabotage of the A. F. of L. leadership." The very ferocity with which reaction attacked showed that they were in a panic over the rising tide of working-class solidarity. His confidence in the working class, in their militancy and great courage, their willingness to organize and fight, was greater than ever before.

He was determined now to build a Left-wing group that would work within the unions as an organized militant minority which could be an instrument of rank and file control and could organize the unorganized.

### THE TRADE UNION EDUCATIONAL LEAGUE APPEARS

After writing his book on the steel strike he tried to go back to work at a railroad job but found himself blacklisted. Finally with a dozen members, including the ever-faithful Jack Johnstone and Joe Manley who had worked at his side in the big campaigns, he organized the "Trade Union Educational League." Its building was interrupted by a visit to the Soviet



Esther and Bill Foster in Kharkov, U.S.S.R., in 1926.

Union in 1921, as a reporter for the Federated Press.

By 1920, another change had begun in William Z. Foster who never hesitated to admit error when convinced. There are many examples of his boldness in self-criticism in his

two autobiographical books which can serve as models for all of us.

These big strikes where he had seen the use of government, judges, police, laws, mayors, etc., had helped to collapse his old "anti-politics" position. A Labor Party was forming in 1920 and he became active in it in Chicago, leaving behind him what he describes as "a dozen years in the sterile desert of Syndicalism."

At last he returned home to his basic position as a Left-wing Socialist. By now this group of American Socialists had formed the Communist Party and in 1921 he announced himself a Communist. He represented the very best of the Socialist Party, the I.W.W. and the trade union movement.

## FOSTER GOES TO RUSSIA

Like all progressive Americans he was tremendously interested in the Workers' Republic, then called Soviet Russia. He was happy to visit it. As he had studied French and German ten years before, he now studied Russian to be able to converse and read there. He tells frankly that like so many Socialists in other countries he was quite sceptical of Socialism developing in any but a highly industrial country. He saw that it was a hard and bitter struggle. But Bill Foster was never averse to struggle. It was the meaning of life to him. He became convinced that these brave and resolute people, who were not unlike the steel and packinghouse workers here, could win through to Socialism.

Five years later he visited there again and found great progress had been made in the workshops by the Russian workers. He described it in his articles as "*just what I had been fighting for all my adult life. What mattered the difficulties of the situation? My class was fighting a desperate revolutionary struggle and my place was in its ranks to help however I could. I must stand shoulder to shoulder with the*



*embattled Russian Workers, win, lose, or draw. I became convinced that the workers would eventually win."*

It was that simple to Bill Foster, American worker, Socialist and internationalist. He knew unhesitatingly which side he was on anywhere in the world—on the workers' side against landlords, bankers, capitalists, and for Socialism.

One thing that pleased Bill Foster mightily was to discover that Lenin, the great leader of the Russian Revolution, agreed with him in what had been disparagingly dismissed by many here as working in the established trade unions. He heard Lenin speak and described him: "*He was such a deep thinker and plain speaker that every time he wrote or spoke he bared the very heart of the question.*" Foster had been under heavy fire for a decade for his opposition to dual unionism.

Lenin's views were widely quoted in Left-wing circles and this helped in building the Trade Union Educational League. Eugene V. Debs on his release from prison endorsed its work. It played an active role in a coal strike in Illinois in 1922, and in a building trades strike in Chicago, where Charles Krumbein was one of the leaders. The League captured the attention of battling workers, especially as Foster's labor reputation was known from coast to coast. They welcomed him everywhere.

## FOSTER KIDNAPPED BY THE RANGERS

During a railroad shopmen's strike of 1922 involving 400,000 men, Bill Foster was kidnapped for the second time. The first time was in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in 1919 when he was seized by 40 men and placed on board a train. In 1922 it happened at the Oxford Hotel in Denver, Colorado. Foster was on a national tour, speaking to thousands of railroaders. Years before Bill Haywood had been slugged and beaten in this same hotel. Foster was taken by the Colorado Rangers



over the state line into Wyoming, turned over to a sheriff there who dumped him out into the open cow country after being driven 350 miles. Foster returned and spoke in Denver. Foster's life was indeed an exciting one.

A big railroad union amalgamation conference of 400 delegates was held in Chicago that year by the League.

In 1923, the expulsion of Communists from unions was first introduced in Chicago, when eleven members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers were expelled. A protest mass-meeting of 3,000 members was held in Carmen's Auditorium. A gunman rushed at Foster while he was speaking. Three shots fired at him lodged in the ceiling. There was never a dull moment for Bill Foster!

The necessity of amalgamation of craft unions into industrial unions was his slogan, and it stirred the workers everywhere.

## *THE BRIDGEMAN CASE*

The Communist Party was virtually driven underground by the persecutions after the Palmer Raids. They held a convention at Bridgeman, Michigan, in August, 1922, which was raided by the Department of Justice agents. Thirty-two delegates were charged with violating the state criminal syndicalist law. Later 40 more were indicted, William Z. Foster among them. Foster was tried first on a charge of unlawful assemblage. They were certain that his reputation as a labor agitator would be against him. But thanks to a woman juror whose sons had died in France for democracy which she took seriously, the jury was a "hung jury."

C. E. Ruthenberg, who became the first Secretary of the Communist Party, after years of Socialist activity in Ohio, was later tried and convicted. He died while the case was on appeal. All other cases were finally dropped. This is the only attempt to illegalize the Communist Party prior to the

present one; and Foster is the only one who was a defendant in both cases.

## *PERIOD OF INTENSE LABOR DEFENSE*

The 'twenties were a period of the wildest anti-Red hysteria. The American working class was involved in a whole series of cases which required the building of a labor defense movement. The class struggle raged on this field. A long campaign was necessary before Debs, the I.W.W. leaders, many other socialists and Communists, who were wartime prisoners were finally released. Hundreds of union members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the International Fur Workers Union as well as the I.W.W. were victims of deportation proceedings.

They had helped the steel strikers and the Russian workers. These were their "crimes." Others, as in the Bridgeman case, were held under the pretext of state criminal syndicalist laws. The frame-up case of Mooney and Billings in San Francisco was the center of tremendous agitation after their arrest in 1916.

And in the '20's came the arrest of Sacco and Vanzetti in Massachusetts, charged with murder, in a dastardly frame-up against two foreign-born "agitators." Charles Ruthenberg, James Larkin, the Irish leader, and others were sent to prison in New York State as a result of the Palmer raids. They were eventually freed by Governor Al Smith, who characterized their arrests as an abridgement of free speech. Larkin was deported to Ireland.

The early death of Charles Ruthenberg was a great loss to the Communist Party, and was undoubtedly due to constant persecution and overwork. A fiery eloquent speaker and a capable executive, his death "removes from the ranks of the working class one of its best fighters and leaders," Foster said in sorrow at that time. Ruthenberg had insisted that the Party

resume its public legal existence and the Bridgeman convention was held to decide on this. By 1923 this was accomplished.

## *CLASS HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF*

The present period, nearly thirty years later, repeats the drama of the class struggle of the '20's, which is not surprising, as the same capitalist system, a much deflated Goliath today and three decades nearer its end, grows more desperate.

In place of Gene Debs, today Gene Dennis is in the dock. Where Bill stood as a prisoner then, today it is again Bill Foster. Ludwig Martens, representative of the Soviet Government in the U.S.A., was then the terrible ogre, the A No. 1 "Red"; which Gerhart Eisler, German Communist, is labeled today. The Socialist Assemblymen were barred from their seats in the New York Legislature, as they now propose to bar Communist Councilman Benjamin J. Davis from the New York City Council. Hundreds of foreign-born workers, who sought freedom and security in America, are now, as then, threatened with deportation.

After the Palmer Raids, came a drive for the open shop and company unionism. Injunctions were used to break strikes of coal miners and railroad workers, as they are today. The Taft-Hartley Law wipes out hard-won rights of labor. It must be clear to all thinking workers today, as it was then, that Red-baiting and labor-baiting are the two sharp edges of the same weapon to subdue and crush the workers. If we failed to realize it fully in the '20's the intervening lessons of fascism, which made deadly use of this weapon apparent to millions in Europe, must surely convince us now.

## "SAVE THE UNIONS"

The re-organized Trade Union Unity League with Foster at its head, like a David fighting this Goliath of Big Business, plunged into the movement to "Save the Unions," especially in mining, textile, and the needle industries. It clashed with union machines which were marking time and not defending the interests of the workers.

It supported militant rank and file leaders, it led movements of locked-out miners, and threw all its forces into their struggle in 1927 when the Jacksonville agreement ended. A relief system was set up, under the leadership of Alfred Wagnerecht, active today in Illinois in defense of the twelve Communist leaders.

The necessity to organize the unorganized pressed hard upon the working class. The Passaic and Gastonia textile strikes, in which Communists played a leading part, were the result of the League's work in this direction. Many independent unions were set up.

Left-wing militancy was fought throughout the '20's and early '30's with the same ruthless brutality which Foster had experienced all his life. Tear gas, clubs, mounted police, arrests, discharge, blacklist, sluggings, shootings, deportations, imprisonment, were regular procedure. Twenty-three workers were killed in four years of struggle.

At this time the Hoover depression hit the nation and millions of workers were unemployed. Foster says quite correctly, *"The only serious resistance of the workers against the mass pauperization was that organized by the Communist Party and the Trade Union Educational League."* Unemployed demonstrations and hunger marches, demanding work or unemployment relief were organized from coast to coast. In these actions fifteen workers were shot down, including five outside the Ford Plant in Detroit, Michigan.



## *FOSTER LEADS THE STRUGGLES OF THE UNEMPLOYED*

The first of a series of national demonstrations was held on March 6, 1930, which brought nearly two million workers into the streets. Foster, with Minor, Amter, and Raymond were arrested and jailed in New York City in a march on the City Hall leading 110,000 workers. Eugene Dennis, then an unknown young Western worker, led a similar march in Los Angeles. Among other leaders of the Communist Party, Carl Winter, John Williamson, Jack Stachel, were also leaders in the unemployed movement.

The gigantic hunger marches to the nation's capital and in states laid the basis for relief, W.P.A. and P.W.A., unemployment insurance. This movement netted the working class millions of dollars for relief and employment on government projects, while denied work in private industry.

"The Right to Work," written into President Roosevelt's Economic Bill of Rights was fought for and won by "Reds" like William Z. Foster. The right to organize unions, to strike, to picket, to collective bargaining were won by "Reds" like William Z. Foster, a worker and a great leader who had grown out of the suffering and the struggles of the workers.

### *BILL FOSTER BECOMES ILL*

In 1932, his hard life of overwork and struggle, privation and jailings took its toll. He was stricken with a serious heart condition, while on tour as a Presidential candidate of the Communist Party. He had also been its national candidate twice before and its candidate for governor of New York State in 1930. He had spent six months in jail on Welfare Island in New York after the unemployed march, where, as he describes it, "the food was not fit for hogs." He had been beaten up and third-degreed by the notorious Red Squad in



"Grandpa" Foster and his grandson, "Butch"

Los Angeles, California, while on one of his campaign tours.

His illness necessitated a prolonged period of inactivity, which was hard to bear. *"My best work,"* he remarks, *"has always been as a mass organizer during big strikes and other struggles, but it was my doubly bad fate to be laid up helpless all through the bitterly fought mass strikes under the New Deal."*

However, the T.U.U.L., led by Jack Stachel as Secretary, played its militant role in the 1933 and 1934 strike waves. At the end of 1934 it dissolved, and its members went back into the existing unions in a supreme attempt at unity of all progressive forces. This helped materially to pave the way for the C.I.O., launched in 1935.

Even though he was for the time being out of the active struggle, Foster took the keenest interest and the greatest

satisfaction from the development of the industrial unionization movement. His 1936 pamphlets on steel were an invaluable guide to a new generation of organizers, especially Communists who were loaned by the Party to the C.I.O. drive. He had devoted 23 years to the struggles in the A. F. of L. and at last they were bearing fruit.

If it had not been for his tragic serious illness I believe Foster would have played a major role in shaping and building that tremendous organizational drive of the '30's which he had planned for so many long, hard years. Far beyond anyone who sits in official places today, Bill Foster, the greatest labor organizer this country ever produced, helped to build the modern labor movement and history will so record. There isn't a single union to which his efforts have not contributed.

## FOSTER AS A WRITER

During his period of illness Foster wrote his two autobiographical books. In his years of activity he has written prolifically, on many subjects related to the class struggle, the Socialist movement, and the Communist Party. Recently he wrote a short pamphlet on the *Woman Question* which caused some young college graduates to marvel at how "learned" he is. He is a rare combination of theoretician and man of action. He is an outstanding example of a working class intellectual, possessing a rounded out education.

Foster believes now as he did in 1900, when as a youth he decided "*I am a Socialist*," that Socialism is the only and final solution of the workers' problems. What his instincts as a working class youth told him was true then, his many years of later experience, his thinking, reading, traveling, organizing and contact with thousands upon thousands of workers for over fifty years, have proven beyond a doubt that "*Capitalism is doomed*." He has lived to see a dream become a reality—the establishment of Socialism or the decisive swing toward it



in country after country in the world today. In 1947 he made another trip to many countries in Europe to study the new trends toward Socialism since World War II, just as he went to study socialism in its birth in Soviet Russia.

## HE RE-VISITS EUROPE

His latest published book *The New Europe*, is an account of this three months' visit to England, France, Italy, Trieste, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Foster believes now, as he did in 1911 and 1921, in going to see for himself what workers are doing in other lands. And as a worker and a Communist, he understands it far better than capitalist-minded journalists who fear a workers' rule.

He writes of the upsurge of postwar people's democracies, of the new democratic governments and their constructive economic planning, of the mass Communist Parties, and the new trade union movement. He tells of the alliance of workers and peasants, of Communist-Socialist unity forged in joint struggle against fascism, and of the cooperative role of the Catholic masses which has brought into play to combat it "a brand of clerical fascism" by the hierarchy. He tells of many Catholic priests who fought bravely in the underground resistance movement, as did the Catholic masses. He shows how the hierarchy is fighting to save the monarchies. The chapter on "The Catholics in the New Democracies" should be re-read by all today.

## FOSTER NEVER BY-PASSED THE CLASS STRUGGLE

He has never under any circumstances let go his conviction that capitalism is on its way out from the stage of history. He has never fallen victim to any illusions of a "progressive capitalism," that capitalism can be made to work, that capi-



talism can last indefinitely, or that class collaboration, the "brotherhood of capital and labor," the lion and the lamb lying down together—ever benefits the workers. He was therefore able to keep his feet on the ground as a real Communist leader during World War II, when he foresaw that the class struggle would be waged in all its desperate fury by the employers, as soon as the war was over. The employers said so boldly.

He foresaw very clearly the role that Wall Street imperialism would play in attempting to rule the world and to reduce Europe and Asia to anti-Soviet economic and political dependencies of the U.S.A. He warned against American labor joining with American Big Business to control other peoples and parroting bosses' slogans of "free enterprise," etc. He warned, too, of an economic depression, like the ten lean years of 1929 to 1939, which Wall Street would try to postpone by feverish war preparations, directed against the U.S.S.R.

He saw more clearly than many of the working class, most of the trade union leaders, yes, and even some Communists, that you cannot abolish the class struggle under capitalism.

## *FOSTER AS A COMMUNIST LEADER*

William Z. Foster demonstrated again his qualities of true leadership, fearless of standing alone, holding to what he knew to be the right postwar course for our Party and the American labor movement to take. He did not advance his views in such a manner as to detract one iota from the war efforts against Nazism and Fascism, but helped to increase those efforts. His writings during the war period were directed always to winning the war, to opening the second front, to unity of the American people with our allies, especially the valiant people of the U.S.S.R., of whose efforts he wrote and spoke most eloquently.

He was a true patriot, who really cared about the best interests of the American workers and people. But he was never fooled by Wall Street profiteers posing as super-patriots, who never made a "no profits" pledge, while labor made and kept its "no strike" pledge. These profiteers had been partners of the European pro-fascist capitalists right up to the day war began, and tried to save and revive them as soon as the war was over.

Foster never forgot his many working-class experiences with these same big monopoly capitalists, such as the big packers and the steel barons. He never forgot that every gain of labor was the result of prolonged and bitter struggle, suffering and sacrifice. Nothing was ever handed to workers on a silver platter. He never forgot workers he saw die in agony as a result of preventable accidents. He never forgot what he saw when he was a mere youth of nineteen, a Negro worker, hoboing to get back home to Mississippi, who was horribly mangled by the train and left to die because he "*wasn't white!*" Nor did he forget the Scottsboro Negro youths, hoboing years later in the '20's looking for work, framed-up by the white supremacists. He had no illusions about the colonial policies of the big capitalist countries toward the "darker races."

## *A FIGHTING PARTY, BILL FOSTER'S SLOGAN*

Words which do not lead to organization and a program of action are meaningless to Bill Foster. He fought to preserve the unity of the Communist Party not as a "debating society" but as a fighting Party based on the working class and leading them in struggle. Foster opposed the dissolution of the Communist Party and its reconstitution as a non-party educational organization in 1944 for these reasons. He did not press his position publicly while the war was on. But he was gravely

concerned lest our Party become enmeshed in the same opportunist errors which had killed the old Socialist Party.

A fighting party of the working class, championing all the immediate needs of the people and having as its ultimate realizable goal the building of Socialism, had always been and remained Foster's correct concept of a Communist Party. Therefore Foster welcomed an article of Jacques Duclos, Secretary of the French Communist Party, in one of its publications after the war ended, which agreed with his criticisms of the dissolution of the American Communist Party.

The result of the party-wide discussion which ensued and a special convention held in July, 1945, affirmed the correctness of Foster's position, hailed the leadership of Foster in the struggle to keep the Communist Party on an even keel and condemned the revisionist (one might say fantastic and visionary) ideas of Earl Browder, which postwar conditions were already beginning to explode before our eyes.

## FOSTER A THEORETICAL LEADER

William Z. Foster is a combination characteristic of the great Communist leaders in all countries—a mass leader, and a profound and systematic student and teacher of the science of Marxism-Leninism. To Foster studying is a part of his political work. "*No leader is so busy that he can afford to neglect theory,*" he says. He is the best theoretical leader produced by the American Communist Party, as its history demonstrates.

As a Left-wing Socialist and union organizer, he rejected anarchistic concepts of spontaneous action and insisted upon planned organization. As a Communist he has fought all notions of inspirational and personal leadership attempting to substitute for it a collective leadership, which is based upon the sound theoretical foundations of Marxism-Leninism. He has insisted upon systematic education of the membership,



not as debaters, but to build a strong core of fighters for the working class.

He took a firm stand against "*American exceptionalism*," which he defines as "the theory that American capitalism has unique economic laws of its own and is capable of regenerating decadent world capitalism." This idea plagued the early Communist Party and later re-appeared under Browder. Foster proved to be right on the post-war role of American capitalism, not as a "prophet," but because he never swerved from basic principles. He has supreme confidence in the ability of the Communist Party to overcome its mistakes.

Today William Z. Foster is active chairman of the Theoretical Commission of the Communist Party, which he initiated in April, 1948. Its purpose is to bring together, organize and direct the work of the Party's theoretical forces, who are numerous, and capable, and in Foster's words "can lock horns with the bourgeois theoreticians and confusionists on every theoretical front"—in the field of economics, politics, history, the arts, the physical and social sciences, etc.

Projects under way include an outline history of the Communist Party and a Marxist analysis of the Woman Question, which will produce a series of articles and a book. Studies of Keynesism (hailed as the "New Economics") are under way, directed to a systematic refutation of the illusion that the capitalist system can be rescued from its deepening crisis. Studies of reactionary philosophy, as taught in American colleges, are in progress.

The purpose of such projects is, in Foster's words "to boldly challenge the bourgeois apologists on every field, as Marxists should, and to bring our Marxist-Leninist answers home to our Party and the broad masses."

## A THOUGHT CONTROL TRIAL

On January 10, 1949, the twelve members of the National Committee of the Communist Party were placed on trial in the Federal court in New York City charged under the anti-labor Smith Act of 1940 with establishing a political party in 1945 to advocate Marxism-Leninism, which the government defines as "force and violence." This is a thought-control trial.

By now I hope I have given you a picture of the life, work and ideas of Bill Foster—to build unions, to build a party of the working class, to fight for Socialism. You are the larger jury who will pass upon these charges. His name leads the list of the indicted twelve.

But Foster was not in court on January 17. Seventeen years have intervened since his mighty heart broke down in 1932. Again the overwork, the stress and strain of his hard life took its toll of Bill Foster, and he suffered another severe heart attack from which he is slowly recuperating.

His devoted wife Esther, who has been a tower of strength at his side since they were married in 1912, and who nursed him through his siege in 1932, is again nursing him back to health. He was recently examined by government doctors who agreed that he could not safely undergo a trial at this time.

Instead of dismissing the ridiculous charges or postponing the whole case until Foster would be able to appear, the government insisted upon a severance. They were apparently very anxious to keep Foster in the background or out of this case altogether and to try him separately later on. But Foster and all of his comrades are on trial together, as is our entire Communist Party and the working class, yes and the whole American people. Make no mistake about that.

Many of those who said in Germany in 1933: "*But I'm not a Communist; it doesn't concern me when Communists are at-*



Henry Winston, Organizational Secretary of the Communist Party and Eugene Dennis, General Secretary, with Bill Foster, 1948.

*tacked,*” found themselves similarly attacked shortly afterwards. Members of unions, other political parties, people’s organizations, women’s organizations, etc., found themselves together with Communists in prisons and concentration camps. If Communists cannot speak, write, organize, your rights to do so are destroyed, too. “Thought control” doesn’t stop with Communists. Fascism demonstrated that.

### *BILL FOSTER’S COMRADES*

Let me just introduce those of Bill Foster’s comrades now on trial whom I have not yet mentioned thus far in this pamphlet. I told you something of Dennis, Williamson, Stachel, Winter and Davis. Irving Potash is a vice-president of the Fur and Leather Workers Union, C.I.O., which helped to stamp out the force and violence of gangsterism against labor in New York City; Gil Green, party organizer from Chicago, was a youth leader. The other three, like Winston, are veterans: Gus Hall, who was a C.I.O. organizer during the bitter



Little Steel strike of 1937; John Gates and Robert Thompson who also fought in Spain against fascism.

Space does not permit me to tell you here in detail of the heroic lives of these men, but I urge you to read other pamphlets about them, who they all are, why they are on trial, and why it is your fight too. Their only "crime" is loyalty to the working class, the crime of Debs, of Mooney, of Bill Haywood and other working-class heroes of the past. It was a "crime" of Parsons, the Molly Maguires, Sacco and Vanzetti and countless others who died for the working class.

As great mass defense movements were built around these famous labor cases of past decades, I urge you to join in building such a movement today—to defend not only "the 12"—but the Bill of Rights and 12 times 12 million Americans. History will give these men their place as 12 bravest and best Americans. Why wait for history, workers in mines, steel plants, packing houses and railroads? Remember the seven years' agony of Sacco and Vanzetti! Don't let it be repeated.

### HONOR HIS 68TH BIRTHDAY

On the 68th birthday of William Z. Foster, who for over 50 years has fought the good fight for the workers, *the National Committee of the Communist Party invites five thousand industrial workers to join our Party in his honor by May 15th.* He is a living symbol of the working-class principles of the Communist Party now "on trial." They have "severed" Bill Foster's case but they cannot "sever" him from the long record of the Communist Party's service in the struggles to organize the unorganized, to defend the rights of the Negro people, to fight for the unemployed, to fight fascism, abroad and at home, in all of which he was a leader. They cannot "sever" Bill Foster from the hearts of thousands of American industrial workers.

A donation to the defense fund recently came from Omaha,

Nebraska, "dedicated to Bill Foster, whose heroic pioneering struggles in the organization of packing is remembered by the old timers here." Similar contributions came in his name from steel workers in Gary and Pittsburgh and from railroad workers, "proud of his 10 years railroading."

In tribute to Bill Foster's close ties with the organization of basic industrial workers, we feel confident that in this hour when he and his comrades are under such vicious attack, when the Communist Party is threatened with outlawing, many brave workers will step forward to stand beside Bill Foster in the ranks of that Party. The very fury of monopoly capital's attack against our Party should be a recommendation for it to all workers. *"We love it for the enemies it has made!"* say advanced workers who understand that old slogan of solidarity, *"An injury to one is an injury to all!"*

Workers feel danger ahead. High prices and speed-ups today are a prelude to the twin threats of fascism and atomic war. The Foster Party Building Campaign was officially opened on February 25. We cannot fail in anything launched in the name of William Z. Foster who never failed, even in the darkest hour, in anything he undertook to organize.

## JOIN THE COMMUNIST PARTY

You who read this may be one of the 5,000 industrial workers we believe are ready and willing to join the Communist Party immediately. We invite you to do so. While we are concentrating on recruiting 5,000 industrial workers, this does not mean that all others are not also welcome. We know that the solid foundation of a Communist Party are the workers and that our Party must be rooted in their struggles. Our responsibility during this campaign is to bring the Communist answers on how to secure a prosperous and peaceful future to the American workers.

Thoughtful workers are cutting through the fog of anti-

Communist hysteria and are seriously questioning the capitalist system and its failure to solve their problems—as young Bill Foster questioned in 1900. That faith in their class, in its tremendous capacities and capabilities to run the world, in their power and intelligence—which permeated the life of Bill Foster will bring them to the idea of Socialism as it did Bill Foster.

A study of the inner workings of capitalism, with all its failures and contradictions, its excesses and abuses, will convince them that capitalism's days are numbered; it has been tried and found wanting; it hampers progress, as Bill Foster understands so well.

Negro and white workers, young workers, women workers—will come to understand the need of being a member of the Communist Party—as he did.

### *BILL FOSTER—AMERICAN*

William Z. Foster has blazed the trail, forged the path, pointed out the goal and led the way. Will you, American worker who reads these lines, accept our invitation to join him in the march toward a Socialist America in our time and generation?

Beginning on his birthday, American workers can thus rightly honor Bill Foster, worker, son of immigrants who came here searching for freedom, labor organizer, Communist. What better answer to give to Wall Street, to the Taft-Hartley Slave Law, to the N.A.M.—to all those who attack the life, liberty and happiness of the American working class? What better way of expressing your commendation of a devoted, selfless, self-sacrificing life of your fellow-worker, Bill Foster, than to join with him, as a member of the Communist Party?

Long life, health, and freedom to you, Bill Foster—great American. May you live to see your ideals come true!



**Great Lessons for Labor!**

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